

Suicide - 1938

Tuscaloosa, Ala., News
January 5, 1938

The Ways And Means Of Suicide

SUICIDE figures may not be pleasant, but all of us have a touch of the macabre, like it or not, and we'll be interested to know that during 1936 in Alabama 229 persons took their own lives. The 1935 total was 211.

Even though the negro population constitutes 36 per cent of the state total, only 16 of these 1936 cases involved negroes. This placed the negro rate at 1.6 per 100,000, while the white rate was 11.6 per 100,000.

As for the ways and means of suicide, firearms are by far the most popular, with 155 persons taking their lives in this manner. Poisoning accounted for 37 and hanging for 14. The others were: Jumping, 6; cutting, 5; poisonous gas, 4; drownings, 4; miscellaneous, 4. Divided by months, these suicides were: January, 13; February, 14; March, 25; April, 19; May, 18; June, 18; July 23; August, 20; September, 21; October, 19; November, 8; and December, 21.

BOOTBLACK KILLS SELF WHEN QUESTIONED BY POLICE OFFICERS

SANTA ANA, Calif., Nov. 10—(ANP)—Clyde E. Wright, 37, boot-black, killed himself last week when police picked him up for questioning regarding a white girl drinking beer with him. He wasn't to be arrested, just questioned, police said. He got in the car and then asked to go to his boss that he would be gone for awhile. Wright went back into the shop, secured a pistol and shot himself. He died the next day in the county hospital after two blood transfusions failed to save him.

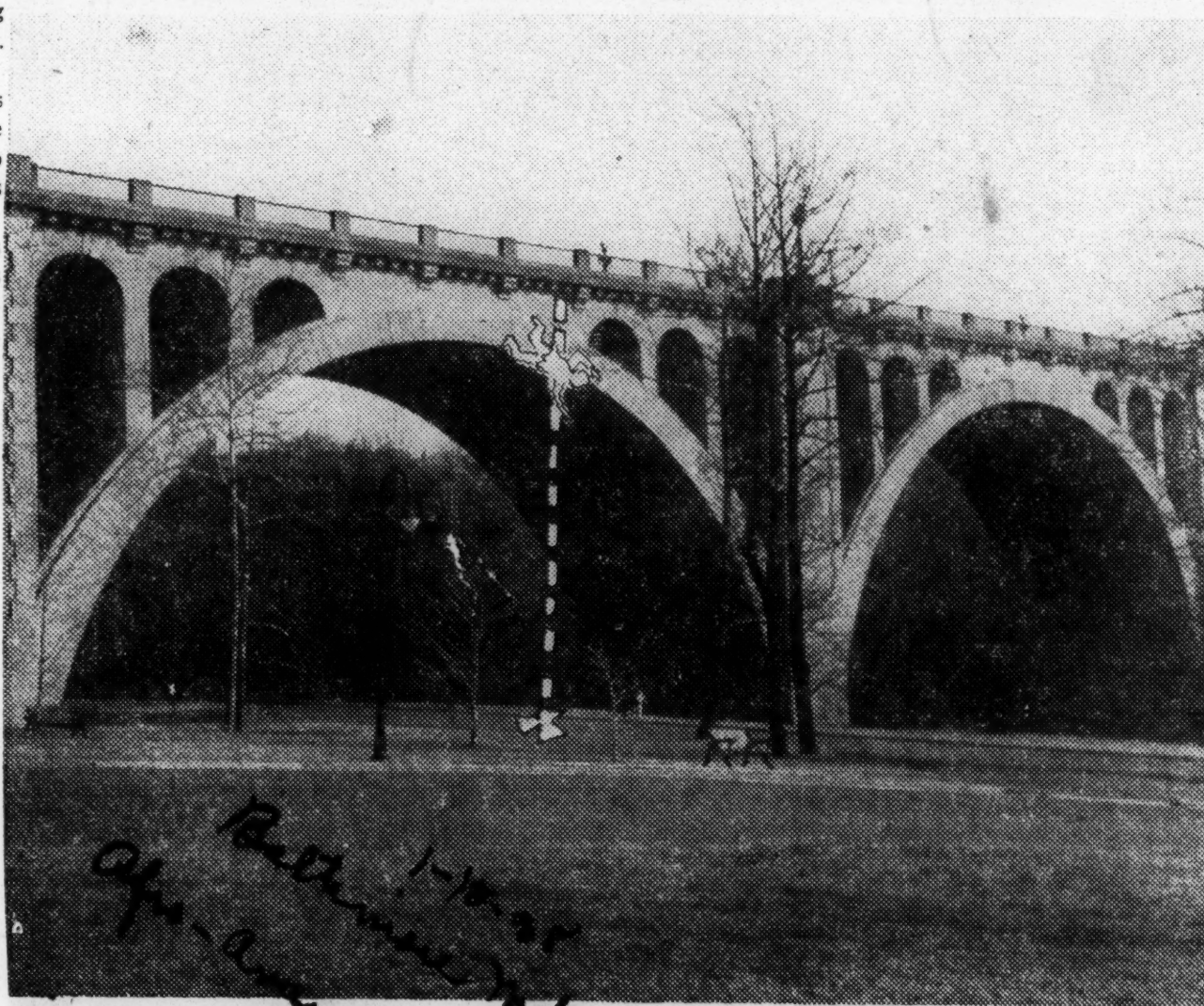
Suicide Leap Foiled, Negro Hangs Himself

BARITAN TOWNSHIP, N. J., Dec 14.—(AP)—A negro, who was coaxed from a perch near the top of a high tension wire pole by a promise of a cigar and a chicken dinner late yesterday, committed suicide in his jail cell today.

Shortly after Police Chief Charles Fraughton announced the man Ernest Adams, 43, would be given a mental examination, a guard found him dead. He had used his shirt to hang himself.

Adams, who said he was born in Alabama but refused to give his address, had threatened to jump from the pole yesterday. He said he was hungry, having eaten only two crackers in two days. Adams said he was the father of 10 children.

SUICIDE BRIDGE CLAIMS 7TH VICTIM



Taft Bridge in Washington claimed its seventh victim, Sunday, when Leonard Mayham, 25-year-old bus boy at the

Wardman Park Hotel in Washington plunged to his death. The bridge is 80 feet tall.

Few Negroes Kill Themselves

It is seldom you see a notice about a negro committing suicide. The writer once asked a negro why it was that few negroes commit suicide. He said negroes have their troubles just like white folks and worry over them. The negro sits down to think about his troubles and falls off to sleep and when he wakes up, he has forgotten about them and takes a new start; the white man stays awake and broods over his trouble until he takes his life to end it all.

Last week a negro killed himself in Marshall County, and a report of the suicide said: "A negro suicide case was recorded in Marshall County, the victim being Clyde Johnson, 40-year-old negro tenant, who shot himself on the farm of Thomas Finley, five miles north of Holly Springs.

"The negro borrowed a double-barrelled shot gun from a neighbor, propped it against a tree and pulled the trigger with a forked stick, officials said.

"The charge entered his heart.

"The negro told the neighbor that he wanted the gun to shoot a turtle, after another negro had taken his own gun away from him, the sheriff said. Bad health was blamed for the act."

Birmingham, Ala. Post
August 25, 1938

University Man Differs With Figures Published By Dr. Fishbein

Editor, The Post:

For several years I have been reading with interest Dr. Morris Fishbein's daily health article in The Post, and have cut out many of them for future reference. But in the one of August 11, on suicide, Dr. Fishbein fell into error by taking too literally some published statistics. He stated that the suicide rate in the United States was higher before 1915 than it has been since, and that it reached a record low in 1920.

But the figures used are based only on those states that keep complete records of births and deaths, which in 1915 numbered only 24, and most of those were Northern. The suicide rate, like the divorce rate, is pretty closely correlated with size of families, increasing as families dwindle, and it is therefore higher in the North than in the South. So as the Southern states gradually came into the "registration area," that caused an apparent decline in the national suicide rate. With the admission of Texas in 1933, the registration became complete, and the statistics since then have been reasonably accurate.

However, every decennial census from 1850 to 1900 collected mortality statistics for every state in the course of the regular enumeration, and although such records may have been far from complete, we can get from them reasonably accurate data

on the relative importance of different causes of death. From these old censuses we find that suicide accounted for .15 per cent of all recorded deaths in the United States in 1849-1850, gradually increasing to .55 per cent in 1899-1900.

The rate dropped during the World War period, here and in Europe too, and reached a temporary low (but not the lowest on record as supposed by Dr. Fishbein) in 1920, when business was flourishing, and we had the highest prices ever known in this country. The panic of 1921 caused a sudden upturn in the suicide curves, followed by a decline for about two years, as business picked up again.

When the bobbed hair fad swept the country, in 1923-24, the suicide curve for white men jumped up a little, while those for women and Negroes were unaffected. Since then the trend has been mostly upward, reaching an all-time high in 1932, the worst year of the recent depression. In that year suicide caused .61 per cent of the deaths of white men in the registration area (47 states), .80 per cent of

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters from readers for publication in The Post Box are welcome. Such letters should be brief and bear the signature and address of the writer.

white women, .57 per cent of colored men, and .19 per cent of colored women. It has fallen off some since, but may soon resume its upward trend if the birth rate decreases and divorce increases, as in the past. In the brief compass of Dr. Fishbein's article he said nothing

about geographical variations in the suicide rate, but it is highest in the West and lowest in the South, even when whites

are considered; which seems to indicate that Southerners are pretty well satisfied with their lot, in spite of this section being the nation's "No. 1 economic problem," as has been asserted recently. In the state that leads the nation in per capita wealth (also in divorce, gambling, "wet" vote, etc.) over three per cent of the deaths in recent years have been suicides, while in the state that ranks lowest in per capita wealth (on account of over half the inhabitants being Negroes) only .84 per cent of the white deaths and .11 per cent of the colored deaths in 1929 and 1930 were suicides. So this is one of several indications that the wealth that most people ardently desire does not necessarily bring happiness.

In Alabama, in five recent years combined, 1932 to 1936, the suicide percentage for whites was 1.21 (in cities with over 10,000 inhabitants 1.91, in the rest of the state .94), and for colored .13 (urban .14, rural .12). In our 15 "wet" counties (most of them with a large urban population) the ratio for whites in 1929-30 was 1.56, and in the rest of the state .85.

Dr. Fishbein referred briefly to the ages of suicides, but could not tell the whole story in his limited space. Among white males in the United States in 1929-1931 the ratio of suicides to all deaths was highest (5.38 per cent) between the ages of 35 and 40, probably mostly on account of business troubles. For white females the peak of 2.70 per cent is between 25 and 30, perhaps largely on account of disappointments in love. Colored males have a peak of 1.14 per cent between 25 and 30, and colored females .48 per cent between 20 and 25. There are practically no suicides under 10 years old, and very few over 80, for children and old people have few responsibilities to worry about.

ROLAND M. HARPER,
Tuscaloosa.

Suicide Leap Foiled, Negro Hangs Himself

BARITAN TOWNSHIP, N. J., Dec. 14.—(AP)—A negro, who was coaxed from a perch near the top of a high tension wire by a promise of a cigar and a bucket of drink, late yesterday, committed suicide in his jail cell today.

Shortly after Police Chief Charles Grandjean announced the man, Ernest Adams, 43, would be given a mental examination, a guard found him dead. He had hanged his shirt to Adams, who said he was born in Alabama but refused to give his address, had threatened to jump from the pole yesterday. He said he was hungry, having eaten only two crackers in two days. Adams had said he was the father of 10 children.